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MISSIONS AND THE MINOR PROPHETS.

Missions and the Minor Prophets.

A SERIES OF BIBLE STUDIES.

BY

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LONDON:
CHURCH MISSIONARY SOCIETY,
SALISBURY SQUARE, E.C.
1909.

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WILLIAM CLOWES AND SONS, LIMITED,
LONDON AND BECCLES.

TO

GERTRUDE,

WIFE AND HELPER,

THIS LITTLE BOOK

IS

AFFECTIONATELY

DEDICATED.

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PREFATORY NOTE.

THIS little book consists of an Introduction which explains its purpose and the method of its use, a general chapter on the Minor Prophets, and six studies on six selected prophets. The studies can be worked through in Study Circles or Missionary Bands, or used as the basis of Bible and missionary teaching in Bible Classes and elsewhere; or read privately by the individual reader. They are intended to be suggestive rather than exhaustive.

The Author owes much to Dean Kirkpatrick's 'Doctrine of the Prophets,' to which he gladly refers the student who would go further than is possible in the compass of this book. He would like also to express his indebtedness to the Rev. G. T. Manley, of the C.M.S., who has read the proof-sheets

and made many valuable suggestions; and to his own sister-in-law, Miss Mary Earle, for much help in verifying references and in other ways.

May God pardon the many imperfections of this humble effort and use it to His Glory and to the extension of His kingdom.

F. S. GUY WARMAN.

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MISSIONS AND THE MINOR PROPHETS.

INTRODUCTION.

THE purpose of this little book is a simple one; it is to help the student of the Bible and the student of Missions. The Christian who realizes the full blessing of the Gospel is both of these. But he sometimes thinks that the two studies are distinct, that they must be kept separate; it is a mistake, and sometimes a costly one. We can study the principles of the Kingdom of God in the Bible; we can watch the development of these principles in the mission-field; we can ponder God's dealing with men in centuries long past; we can see Him deal with men in the same all-wise, all-loving way in the Uganda or China of to-day. And the double study confirms our faith, excites our earnest service,

in a way which can be done by neither study alone. We are apt to forget that the God Who by His Spirit made the story of the Church of Antioch a wonderful story indeed is the same God Who to-day writes for us the wonderful story of Uganda. We need to study His revelations of Himself and of His Will both in the book He has given us and in the practical experience of the Church, at home and abroad, which He overrules and guides to-day. This one study —for it is but one study—will, through the inspiration of His Spirit, produce its results. It will broaden our view, it will get rid of the old and inept distinction that has too long obtained between Home and Foreign Missions; it will enable us to see that the work of God's Church in every age and in every land has but one object—His glory and the bringing of His Kingdom into heart and nation, until in all its glory it be fully come. Our study will do more; it will enable us to realize that the religion of the Lord Jesus Christ is the one and only religion, compared with which the best of

the world's religions is but an aimless groping in the dark. There is a tendency nowadays to imagine that the religion of each nation is sufficient for its purpose; that it contains enough of the truth to help and guide its adherents. There is good in the religions of Heathendom. God has not altogether left Himself without witness; but when one begins to compare the religion of the Bible with that of Confucius or Mohammed or Buddha, the Christian heart is stirred to the high endeavour to plant the banner of the Cross where these now hold sway. And so this little book, written amid the hurry of a busy life, with manifold weakness and incompleteness, at least has a purpose worthy of attainment. The better knowledge of God's Book and of His world will make us better servants of His. May He order and bless this humble effort to that end.

This book is meant to be studied, not merely read; to be worked through, Bible in hand, not taken up for a leisure half-hour in an armchair. No attempt has been made

to save the reader trouble, little attempt to teach him, only an effort to help him teach himself. It can be used by the solitary student, but it is especially written for little bands of people willing to meet together some six times to study missionary problems in the light of God's word. It is the fifth of a series, three by Mrs. Carus-Wilson, dealing respectively with different sections of the New Testament, and one by the Rev. G. T. Manley, dealing with the Gospel in the Psalms. This is especially intended for study in the coming winter by Bible Circles, Study Bands and Missionary Bands of various kinds. It is hoped that these chapters may not only be of use to such societies already in existence, but that they may lead to the formation of small groups here and there of Sunday-school teachers, Bible Class members and personal friends for missionary study along the lines suggested. Leaders of Bible Classes may find material here for an occasional lesson or a short course of lessons intercalated with the ordinary teaching of their class. It is

essential to the declaring of the whole counsel of God that such lessons should be given at not infrequent intervals, and it is important that in all our study and in all our teaching a due sense of proportion as to missionary motive and incentive should be maintained.*

A word of explanation is needed. There are two main motives for missionary enterprise, one of which is immeasurably more important than the other. The first of them is our Lord's great command: 'Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: . . . and, lo, I am with you alway.' This is absolute, and brooks no exception of time or place or circumstance. The other motive is typically presented to us in the words of the man of Macedonia: 'Come over . . . and help us.' It is the great need of the heathen world. In all our teaching and study these two motives

* A little pamphlet containing useful hints for Bible Class teachers may be obtained from the C.M. House, Salisbury Square, London, E.C.

must have their place, but in the right order and the right proportion. If the state of the heathen world were such as to entirely obscure its need, if our whole enterprise of modern Missions were an entire failure, and never secured a convert or founded a Church, the Church's duty to evangelize would still stand. We quote the great commission, but too often the crying needs of Heathendom and the romantic successes of missionary enterprise loom largest in our minds, in our study and in our teaching. The result is that some people imagine that Missions are matters of argument and of policy, with resultant indifference, talk of retrenchment, and indeed retrenchment itself. Missions are matters of life and duty to the Church; whilst we may discuss organization, methods, prospects and successes, we cannot, and we must not, discuss our interest in the missionary work of the Church at home and abroad as if it were a matter about which we have the right to be indifferent.

The best corrective to this lack of proportion, a lack of proportion which is

reflected in the appalling indifference of the great bulk of Christian people, is missionary study along Bible lines. The will of God as revealed in the Bible is the will of God that is to be done in the Church. Science has been teaching us, in these latter days, much of the wonderful order which obtains in the universe, showing us with what uniformity of order and method and plan God works. Properly and reverently reading the lessons that science teaches us, we may expect to find a similar uniformity in the laws of the Kingdom and of Grace. Speaking quite reverently, we understand God better to-day than they did in the days of the primitive Church, much better than they did in the days of the Old Testament theocracy. But, after all, the God Who by His Holy Spirit is winning triumphs for Himself to-day in the far-off places of the field, is the same God Who carried His people through the troublous days of the Exile, and by the teaching of His servants prepared the way for the coming of the Messiah.

The title of this little book may have led

some to ask, What is the good of studying the minor prophets from a missionary point of view? The Author ventures to hope that the book will answer the question, and only now reminds the reader that God is One, His work is one, and that though times may change, circumstances may vary, and the light of the Sun of Righteousness may ever be shining brighter and brighter, the lessons that Amos and Micah, Haggai and Zechariah taught to the people of the Old World, still need to be taught in this day of fuller revelation to the people of the New World.

It is impossible, in the course of six short studies, to deal with the whole of the minor prophets, or indeed with any of them adequately; all that is attempted is to deal with a few of them under some special aspect of the work of each, to compare them in certain particulars with each other, and to bear in mind all the time that we are reading them and studying them for the purpose of discovering the light which their life and words and work throw upon the missionary

problems of to-day. No attempt will be made at an exposition of their writings, or at a critical study of the character and history of their books. We are pursuing but one line of inquiry amongst many, and there must be no pretence of exhaustive treatment. At the beginning of each chapter a brief note upon the book and its author will be given; for further study the reader is referred to Dean Kirkpatrick's book, 'The Doctrine of the Prophets,' to which, and to Dr. G. A. Smith's book of 'The Twelve Prophets,' the Author wishes to acknowledge his indebtedness.

SUGGESTIONS TO LEADERS AND STUDENTS.

Authorized and Revised Versions.

WE most of us have prejudices, from use and affection, for the Authorized Version, and it is quite easy to criticize the language of the Revised. But we are dealing with prophets who wrote in the Hebrew tongue, and the study of Hebrew has made such tremendous advances since the translation of the Authorized Version, that the serious student, however reluctant to do it, must study this portion of the Bible in the Revised Version, or he will lose much of its meaning.

Methods of Bible Study.

In this little book the method of study will be suggested as its pages are worked through; the main point that needs to be emphasized is this: that the references

which are given are not given for ornament but for use. They should be carefully looked out, their context examined, and their bearing noted. The Bible itself is the best aid to the study of any part of it. The wealth of commentaries and of books about the Bible which have been showered upon us, sometimes dangerously tends to obscure the study of the book. The general Bible paper in the examination room all too frequently shows signs of much reading about the Bible and very little knowledge of the Bible itself. And what happens to candidates for examinations may sometimes happen in the case of other students. On the general subject of Bible study the Author would like to commend two little books: Principal Griffith Thomas on 'Methods of Bible Study,'* and the Rev. Harrington Lees on 'The Joy of Bible Study.'† Both these books will bear reading and re-reading, and their influence on the reader's study of the Bible will be altogether helpful.

* Published by Marshall Bros.
† Longmans, Green & Co.

The Chapter.

Each of the six Chapters in this little book is intended to be complete in itself. It deals mainly with one prophet, though for purposes of comparison it may frequently quote from another. The Chapter is not intended to be itself the subject of study; it is simply intended to guide that study. If the book is being used for a Study Circle, it should at least be worked through by the leader; if possible, by all the members.

The following two purposes are held in view in each Chapter :—

(1) There is an endeavour, firstly, to show how each particular prophet, either in his history or in his work, illustrates the idea which is expressed in the sub-heading of the Chapter.

This idea, together with the 'Aim,' which is placed at the heading of each Programme, should be clearly set before the minds of all the members before they make their preparation. It will then guide their reading, and act as a thread upon which the

beads of information and conclusion may be strung. They will come to the meeting on Chapter IV., for example, not wondering vaguely what Haggai has to do with the missionary enterprise, nor having merely fastened upon the familiar texts, but with the material prepared for a discussion upon the need of putting the Lord's building before the building of ceiled houses. In a word, Heading and Aim and Chapter will concentrate the mind upon one line of thought.

(2) The second purpose of the Chapter is to indicate the lines along which some missionary applications may be found. The subject problems for study at the end have in view a further development of this purpose. These two purposes are but divisions of the one central object of each study, which is to show the practical teaching and bearing of each prophet's message upon the missionary work of to-day. In the Programme this object will be defeated unless both the purposes here stated are kept in mind.

Where the Chapter is used as the basis of a missionary lesson or address it must be most carefully studied, the references looked out, and a sketch of the address made from it.

The Questions.

Two sets are given in each case. The first, a simpler set, to be answered from the Chapter itself, or from the references contained in it, which may be studied beforehand by the members of the Circle or Band, and answered together at the meeting or not, as the leader may think fit or time allow. The other series is somewhat more difficult, and arises out of the subjects discussed in the Chapter; these questions should be talked over together at the meeting of the Band, and should be studied by the leader beforehand; or they might be allocated at the previous meeting to individual members for study and thought during the week and for introduction at the next meeting. They may be omitted altogether in Circles which find them too difficult.

Programme.

At the end of each Chapter a Programme is given in detail, but simply by way of suggestion, to be adopted or not as the leader may think fit. The great danger at all our devotional gatherings is that one form of programme should become stereotyped. To maintain interest we must have variety, variety from meeting to meeting, and variety at frequent intervals during the hour of meeting itself.

As they stand, some Circles would be able to accomplish these Programmes in an hour or an hour and a half. Others would only be able to accomplish about half of them in this time.

In a matter like this the leader must exercise his judgment as to what to omit. In doing so he should retain that which will create the greatest interest in that particular Circle, and most tend to realize the 'Aim.'

These Programmes are purposely varied. It would be well for the leader to look through all the Programmes before the

commencement of the Circle, and then make out his own from the ideas here suggested, bearing in mind what has just been said as to omission.

In some cases the suggestion will be made that one Chapter be spread over two meetings. This should never be done without the strongly expressed wish of the Circle. Where this wish is strong the interest will be maintained, but not otherwise.

Prayer.

Every meeting should be opened and closed with prayer, in which as far as possible all should take part. Prayer should be varied in type, neither altogether extempore, nor altogether liturgical; and here again, further variety should be aimed at. Members may be allowed to pray as they feel led; or subjects may be announced and extempore prayer offered; or a subject and a suitable collect may be given on a slip of paper to each member; members may be encouraged to bring petitions which may be offered by

themselves or by others; or, again, special petitions may be mentioned and may be woven into a Litany, 'That it may please Thee to grant that,' etc., and all may answer, 'We beseech Thee to hear us, good Lord.'

The various forms of prayer issued by the Society should be in the hands of the leader, and the writer would specially like to commend a series of missionary prayers by the Rev. W. B. Ferris, once a C.M.S. missionary in Ceylon, published by J. W. Moore, East Street, Chichester. The prayers at a meeting are often looked upon as a small matter of detail, and it is sometimes forgotten that Prayer and Bible Study are twin means of grace, neither less important than the other; both must be prepared for, and neither must be neglected.

With regard to extempore prayer two warnings are necessary: first, it must be short; and, second, it must not be used as a means of giving addresses to each other, on our knees, on all sorts of indefinite subjects.

The Aim.

In order to get the maximum of profit from these studies, a certain amount of concentration is desirable. This is secured partly by the sub-headings which denote the topics specially marked out for consideration, and partly by the Chapters, which provide further material for thought along this line.

The use of the Aim will be chiefly felt in the meeting itself; without some such aid the discussion tends to be discursive and to flow into side-channels. In driving in a nail, blows from different directions tend to nullify each other and loosen it, but those directed uniformly tend to help each other and secure it; so, in driving ideas into our minds and convictions into our hearts, unity of purpose is the secret of a strong impression.

The Aim, moreover, forms a Court of Appeal for the leader when individual members tend to digress. It likewise helps him in his prayers beforehand, and in

judging of his success or failure afterwards. 'Did we learn from the book of Jonah what are the vital elements in the missionary call?' is the touchstone by which programme and meeting may alike be tested.

The Study Circle Leader.

There are certain principles, such as that of the 'Aim,' which underlie all united study. The more elementary of these principles will be found in a little pamphlet, 'Missionary Study Circles' (1*d.*, from C.M. House, Salisbury Square, E.C.), of which all leaders should obtain a copy.

The leader's function is not to teach, but to make the members keen to study themselves. This will only be secured by giving them the chief share both in the preparation and in the meeting itself. The programmes provide for this; and the wise leader will also see that his members are supplied with motives for study.

Thus, for example, at the end of the meeting on Chapter IV., Question 3 on Chapter V. might be pointed out and questions asked as

follows: 'Could you describe these visions? Have they ever struck you as being able to supply us with a definite ground of hope? Do you not think it would be interesting to read each and see if you can find a missionary lesson in it before reading the Chapter?' The motives of desire to remove ignorance, anticipated pleasure in discovery, and emulation might all thus be brought into play, and the visions would be keenly studied and not accepted as so much mere labour.

The leader will seek to develop the personal character of each member, encouraging most, repressing some, suggesting possibilities of personal missionary service to one or two, and trying to help all.

These are high ideals, but with prayer and pains they are not beyond the attainment of very ordinary people.

THE MINOR PROPHETS.

ORDER IN THE OLD TESTAMENT, APPROXIMATE DATE, AND NUMBER OF CHAPTERS.

Hosea	755 to 740	14 chapters
Joel	c. 840?	3 „
Amos	c. 760	9 „
Obadiah	c. 845 or 586	1 „
Jonah	?	4 „
Micah	c. 730	7 „
Nahum	c. 640	3 „
Habakkuk	c. 600	3 „
Zephaniah	630	3 „
Haggai	520	2 „
Zechariah	520	14 „
Malachi	c. 435	4 „

N.B.—Where c. (*circa*) is inserted before the date, it implies that the date is very approximate; where a query is added, that the date is very doubtful; the date of Jonah is too doubtful even to suggest an approximation. The dates given above are mainly those of Dean Kirkpatrick.

THE PROPHETS OF ISRAEL.

WE hail Jesus as Prophet, Priest and King; we find in the pages of the Old Testament prophets, priests and kings who, in varying degree, foreshadow the work and Person of Him Who was to come. He was a priest, like Aaron or Melchizedek or any one of the long line of the chief priests of Israel; but in the character of His Priesthood He differed infinitely from them in that He was Himself the victim and Himself the Priest; and so precious, so unspeakably precious, was His offering that it was made but once, and suffices for all the needs of all the world. He was King, like David or Hezekiah, but unlike and beyond them, His Kingdom is everlasting, and one day shall be universal. He was, He is, Prophet, Messenger and Mouthpiece of God, the revealed Word of God. The old prophets spoke God's message as they received it: He is God's

message, the revelation of God, God Himself. 'God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in His Son' (Heb. i. 1, R.V.). 'In the beginning was the Word . . . and the Word became flesh' (St. John i. 1, 14, R.V.). So to Him we look as God's final message, and God's final Messenger, and by the Spirit Whom He has given us our life is guided, helped and strengthened. As Christ supersedes all priesthoods, so in very truth He takes the place of all prophecy, and we find in Christ what the Old Testament Church found in the prophets. But they have their place in the affection and study of the Christian Church. They point to Christ, and the God Whom they served and before Whom they stood is our God; and so St. Athanasius writes wisely when he says, 'It was not for the sake of the Jews alone that the prophets were sent, but for the whole world—they were a sacred school of knowledge concerning God and our spiritual citizenship.' They were the

visible representatives of the Holy Ghost in those old days, and the lessons in piety and prayer, in work and method, that they taught can never be out of date, because they are lessons taught of God. 'The voices of that long succession of men whom He raised up from time to time through a period of more than a thousand years were the Voice of God.'* So we turn to their written words to find help and inspiration and guidance, even in the missionary work of the Church. Old Testament prophecy caught a glimpse of the Universal Kingdom of Christ, and we are still engaged along the same lines of divine co-operation, in translating that vision into a reality. This book is an attempt, by means of six short, sketchy studies, to gather up some of these missionary lessons, and to indicate the methods by which we may gather more ; but these lessons will be all the simpler and more effective if we first discover something of the history of the prophetic order, something

* Kirkpatrick, 'The Doctrine of the Prophets,' page 1. To the student who would go further than the mere sketches of this book, Dean Kirkpatrick is the best guide.

of the work they were sent to do, and something of the times in which they lived.

The History of the Prophetic Order.

When man fell, communion between man and God was marred and broken. In Eden and in heaven men see Him face to face: they walk and talk with God. In the long weary parenthesis of sin a mediator stands between. Sometimes he is a priest—such was the one Mediator; sometimes he is a prophet—so was the Christ. The priest in the main stands between as man's representative, the prophet as God's. If the Old Testament priesthood had been truly loyal to Jehovah they might have combined the dual office, as indeed some did. But almost from the very beginning the two orders existed. Noah was a prophet, so was Enoch, so was Moses, so were the patriarchs (Gen. xx. 7; Ps. cv. 15). During all the early period God spoke to His people in various ways, revealing Himself by dreams and visions and special messengers, and although they are not always so

called, these messengers were just as much prophets as Isaiah or Haggai, 'the Lord's messenger in the Lord's message.' But with Samuel began a new era; the prophet comes to stay, to take his place alongside the priest as a help to the religious life of the nation, and, as a rule, to do more for spiritual religion than the priesthood, even in its best days, had been able to do; sometimes—alas! too often—to stand for God when a decadent priesthood had forsaken Him. There were bad prophets and good priests, but in the long run prophecy did more for the Old Testament Church than priesthood, and to-day, when all priesthood and all prophecy has been consummated in Christ, the world needs prophets, when the mere sacerdotal functions of the priesthood are once for all and for ever discharged. Eli and his sons failed: Samuel came to do a new work for God. He was a prophet, and he founded the school of the prophets, where men were trained for prophetic functions, though perhaps not all were called of God to fulfil them. From Samuel onwards

each hour of need found its man, each crisis its prophet. God sent and sent during all the days of the kings; too often His message was only half heard or wholly unheeded, 'until there was no remedy,' and exile followed. It is well to remind ourselves in rough outline of the history. First comes the undivided kingdom under Saul, David and Solomon, the best and most glorious days. Then Solomon's sins come home to judgment, and the people of God are divided into two; the smaller kingdom of Judah retaining Jerusalem and the Temple and the national religion; the larger planning out for themselves a worship intended to be, despite its images, the worship of Jehovah, but void of its spirituality and power. So the unhappy days of schism, of frequent strife—even of war,—of occasional and soon broken friendship, rolled on. It was a period of terrible need; God was little in man's thoughts but man was much in His, and in one of the saddest days of the history of the faith, the golden age of prophecy dawns; we come to the prophets whose

writings have endured to our everlasting benefit. The northern kingdom of Judah lasted till 722 B.C., the smaller kingdom of Judah, a little more faithful to Jehovah, with men like Hezekiah and Josiah to draw the people nearer to Him, endured till 586, when they too went into exile. That exile purged and purified until, in the mercy of God, a smaller but a truer band returned to the land of their fathers in 537. These, too, needed prophets to encourage them and to rebuke them, and they had them in Zechariah and Haggai; and in days later still, when mercy once more was forgotten, there comes the nameless Malachi (My messenger) to rebuke and to warn. It is difficult to at all accurately fit the various prophets whose writings we possess into their historical position: Amos came first of all, or perhaps Joel, followed closely by Hosea, Isaiah and Micah. Amos and Hosea belonged to the northern kingdom, while Isaiah and Micah worked in Judah. All these belong to the eighth century before Christ. Zephaniah and Nahum belong to the seventh.

Just before the final exile came Jeremiah and Habakkuk, with Ezekiel during the exile itself. The prophets came at different times, to people in different frames of mind and in different attitudes towards God; their messages in consequence differed widely, and we must not treat their writings as if they were one long book addressed to the same audience at the same time.

The Work of the Prophet.

What exactly was he? What was his work? What the features of his office? First of all, let us clear away a most mischievous misconception. He was not called to be a mere foreteller of future events. The word 'prophet' means a forth-teller, a teller forth or proclaimer of a message, not a foreteller, a predictor of the future. A prophetic writing may contain no prediction and yet be truly prophetic. A prophet is no less a prophet because he foretells no single thing. The gift of prophecy to which St. Paul refers as the best of the spiritual gifts save love (1 Cor.

xii.) is the gift of Christian preaching. What we call a sermon to-day was often a century or two since called a prophesying. The preaching of the Gospel is prophecy. The Old Testament prophet, the New Testament prophet, the preacher of to-day and of every day may find in his message the need of prediction. Indeed, it is impossible to preach the Gospel without prediction. The Christian certainties are matters of prediction. In the old days it sometimes happened, perhaps more often than now, because we have fuller revelation, that the prophet's message involved a prediction of hope or of doom. When it was so, by inspiration of God, it often happened that these predictions were fuller, clearer and in greater detail than any modern preacher could pretend to. But it is a mistake to imagine that these wonderful predictions are the essence of the prophet's message. Christ healed the sick and cleansed the leper, and men have marvelled at the miracles of Christ, and sometimes have allowed these miracles to overshadow the

real work of Christ, of which they were but illustrations, sacraments and parables—the salvation of the world. The comparison is not wholly accurate, but in some ways prediction was to the prophet's work what miracles were to Christ's.

The prophet's real task was to speak God's message just as he received it, whether it were sweet or bitter, palatable or distasteful. 'Thus saith the Lord' is the prophetic watchword, and God speaks of the past and the present quite as much as of the future. Whether it be a call to repentance or an encouragement to work, the prophet always speaks of an urgent present duty, 'Now then, do it'; 'Be strong and work'; and the best answer to the prophetic message is the answer of repentance and effort. 'The people did work.' The prophet was sent at a moment of crisis to speak God's message and to produce, if men were but willing, God's result. What did he need to fill his office? Prediction? Sometimes, perhaps. Foresight? Often, yes. But, more than all, insight, the

power to see things as they really are, as God sees them. The prophet is the man who sees things from God's point of view. It needs the inspiration of God the Holy Spirit that he may do so. That inspiration is given to us all; it varies not in character, but in degree. To some a higher measure is given; it was so to the prophets of old. Let me quote some words from one who preached a wonderful sermon on the prophet's task, Archbishop Magee:* 'But insight—the power to see things as they truly and really are; the knowledge not of where or what we shall be to-morrow, but of where and what we are now; the light which falls not upon the darkest horizon, but upon the path before our feet; the gift which makes us not knowing, but wise, wise unto salvation — this, for man or for nation, is God's most precious gift. And this, in far greater measure than is ordinarily bestowed on men, was God's chief gift to His prophets of old. By the help

* In 'Growth in Grace,' p. 29. Published by Isbister. Price 3*s.* 6*d.*

of it they saw ever clearly before them two great facts—one a kingdom of God on earth, and the other kingship of God over all kingdoms, though they knew and owned Him not. They saw in the Jewish nation . . . a kingdom whose mission on earth was to preserve the knowledge of, and maintain the rule of, the one and only true God; to keep alive for mankind pure faith and pure life amidst the false faiths and foul life of surrounding Heathendom. And, on the other hand, they saw the supreme rule and moral government over all those mighty empires which rise and fall around the little realm of Palestine, as the waves of the sea rise and swell and toss around some beacon whose light shines out upon their dark restless waves, and whose rock-grounded strength resists their fiercest might.'

The relation between prediction and preaching, between foresight and insight, has been emphasized here almost to an exaggeration, but it is done because so many minds associate prediction, and prediction

only, with the work of the Old Testament prophets. We must, however, not depreciate the importance of that predictive element. It was a test oftentimes of the prophet's call. Above all, it was the means used of God to prepare the world for the coming of the Messiah. There is no clearer prediction, prediction of a special character, made possible by the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit, than that which tells us of the coming suffering and yet triumphant Messiah. Foretelling and forthtelling are not opposed to each other; they are both necessary to the divine message. Prediction had larger place in the olden days because the Christ was not yet. The old prophets and the modern missionary, the Church of the Old Testament and the Church of Christ, have the same task and the same privilege—to carry the message of God to the world, the message of His universal love which leaves out from its embrace not one single one of the souls of men if they will but come within it.

How little Judah and Israel realized the magnificent duty that was theirs! how little we of the English Church and the English nation realize ours to-day! The prophets were sent to help Judah and Israel to realize it, and they may help us too, and, as we are studying a special aspect of the prophets' message, we naturally turn to the

Missionary Message of the Prophets.

Little need be said, for the studies of this little book will help to indicate the message. The prophetic insight enabled these messengers of Jehovah to see in more or less degree that Jehovah was not the God of their own nation only, differing little from the local deities of surrounding peoples. They saw that the All Holy One must reign supreme and that His kingdom must be universal, and now and again, by a word here and a word there, they show their knowledge. It is no forcing of language which makes us see a connexion between modern Missions and the minor prophets of the Old Testament Church. We are their heirs. We

see what many prophets and kings desired to see. They saw but the first faint streaks of light that marked the coming of the day; we live in the ever-brightening sunshine. But their God is our God; He changeth not; and the lessons He taught by prophets of old we still need to learn. God help us to learn them better.

'The spirit of prophecy is the testimony of Jesus.' We might as truly write, 'The spirit of Missions is the testimony of Jesus.' The prophet looks forward to Christ: the missionary back to Him. The work of both centres round His person and His work. Prophet and missionary are fellow-workers unto the same Gospel. Note the great facts which the few simple words of the great commission bring before us—the fact of a Saviour; the need of repentance; the duty of witness; the universality of the kingdom; the secret of the worker's power; the nature of the worker's call; the greatness of the salvation offered and its wondrous fulness. Take up the prophets, and as you read them you find they are full of the same topics

and the same message. After all, Missions constitute the whole work of the Church as a Church; the prophets were doing that work, and as a result their writings cannot help but be instinct with a missionary enthusiasm. The Bible has a bias, if we may so call it, to missionary enterprise; wherever we turn we find it so, and the Church will be best loyal to the Bible when it has cultivated the same 'bias' to preach the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ to every creature.

The Writings of the Prophets.

There were many prophets; we have but the writings of few, three whom we call the greater—Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel—because of their greater importance and the length of their writings; the rest, some thirteen, are called minor. Daniel, who to our modern notions seems most prophetic, that is, predictive, was not reckoned with the prophets by the Jews. He was a seer of revelation, like St. John, not a prophet pure and simple. The books that have come down to us are doubtless but fragments of

each prophet's work, carefully selected by the guidance of the Holy Spirit Himself; very much like the volumes of sermons by great preachers published to-day, but after the custom of earlier times not so carefully edited and annotated. We must keep this in mind if we are to understand them. They cannot be read as continuous books; at least, not often so. Sometimes the divisions are marked, as in Haggai or Zechariah; sometimes we move to a fresh address with very little to indicate the transition, as in Micah and in Isaiah.

We must read carefully, getting all the help we can from the historical books of the Old Testament, and we shall find as we go on that care will be repaid in added interest and understanding. Re-name the Book of Haggai 'A series of open-air addresses by an old-time preacher,' and it sounds much simpler and more attractive. So with every book; the prophets are difficult, they require careful study, but they yield their treasures to it. They look so hard that we pass them by; if these studies

help any one to turn to those old messages from God again and again with fuller understanding, they will have served their purpose; and if as we turn to them we catch something of God's great destiny for His Church, and we rise from our study with a fuller determination by prayer and effort to bring His Kingdom near, our study will not only have helped us, but it will have helped to the fulfilment of the prophets' words and works, to make this world of ours His world for ever.

CHAPTER I.

JONAH, AN EARLY MISSIONARY TO THE HEATHEN.

A Study in Missionary Vocation.

'*Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?*'

Passage for study.—Jonah i. 1-3; ii.; iii. 1-4.

THE Story of Jonah.—It is exceedingly difficult to date this book. The book is called Jonah, not because he wrote it, but because it contains his story. The prophet lived in the reigns of Amaziah, king of Judah, and Jereboam II., king of Israel, at the latter end of the ninth century B.C. (2 Kings xiv. 25). We know nothing more about him save that which is told us in his book and the fact referred to in the passage just quoted. Modern criticism has discussed the book with considerable interest, and different scholars have arrived at different conclusions about it. For our purpose it is unnecessary to

enter into those discussions. The story of Jonah is referred to by our Lord in St. Matthew xii. 39, xvi. 4, and the parallel passage in St. Luke xi. 32, where he uses the sign of the prophet Jonah as an illustration, and the preaching of Jonah and the consequent repentance of the Ninevites as an example to the age in which He Himself was preaching. But here we are confining our attention to the call of Jonah to his special work. The special points with which we are concerned are the call of Jonah, his reluctance and its attendant lessons, and the fact that he was called to be a missionary to the Heathen.

Vocation in the Old Testament.—In the pages of the New Testament much emphasis is laid on the circumstances and character of those who were called to serve the Master. We watch Him as He went from place to place calling one here and one there—first a group of fishermen, then a tax-gatherer; some from the mending of nets, another from his lucrative employment—to leave all and follow Him. We study and rejoice over

the call of the great Apostle of the Gentiles, and we watch him as he becomes the means of calling others to the same service. We go back to Old Testament days and we find God calls men in just the same way to render special service to Himself—all service is special—and in days when the lamp of divine revelation burnt more dimly than to-day, men gladly heard the call. We leap forward to our own day and our own lives: God help us to hear His call to the special piece of missionary work that He has for us to do.

Let us look at some of these Old Testament calls, simply as types of many others. With Bible in hand, let us trace these lives up to the time when their special work began. In the troublous days of the Judges we have a splendid instance in Gideon (Judges vi.). Gideon was an untrained, insignificant and, humanly speaking, incapable person. To put him at the head of a great undertaking was to court disaster. But he was a believer in Jehovah, a very ordinary and not very optimistic believer.

Evidently the problem of his day weighed upon his mind (Judges vi. 13), and he was inclined to blame God for its greatness. Those terrible words 'deficit,' 'retrenchment,' 'the pause in missionary enterprise,' weigh on our minds: we are half inclined to acquiesce in the present state of things, to talk gloomily of the failure of missionary enterprise, and to blame God in part for it all. Suddenly we are reminded as Gideon was that we have a part to play; it may not be so great an one as his, but God calls us to do something, and we begin to make excuses just as Gideon did. Search that sixth chapter of Judges for Gideon's doubts of God, and you will find that all our doubts of God and all our excuses are hidden there.

(1) Doubt of God's presence (ver. 13): 'If the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us?'

(2) Doubt of God's power (ver. 13): 'Where be all His miracles?'

(3) Doubt of God's faithfulness (ver. 13): 'But now the Lord hath forsaken us.'

(4) Doubt of God's wisdom (ver. 15): 'Wherewith shall I save Israel?'

(5) Doubt of God's mercy (ver. 17): 'If now I have found grace in Thy sight, then show me a sign that Thou talkest with me.'

His sense of his own unfitness was really a doubting of God. How wondrously merciful and patient God was with him! How wondrously He taught him the lesson we can never learn too well—the invincible power of the weakest if God stands behind! Gideon heard the call; his doubts, though from time to time they assailed him again, were conquered. You will find the secret of his success in verse 34, 'the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon'; or, as the margin of the R.V. renders it, 'the Spirit of the Lord clothed itself with Gideon,' and then the youngest son of Joash could do exploits for God.

The call of Gideon has been dealt with at some length to indicate the lines along which we can consider similar calls. Here is a list of some of the most striking ones: Isaiah (see Isa. vi.), Amos (see Amos vi.

14, 15), Jeremiah (see Jer. i., especially verses 7 and 8). Turning for a moment to the pages of the New Testament, we cannot but be struck with the way in which our Lord gathered His disciples and workers around Him. They were men of various ranks of life, men whose characters were differently estimated by the world, men of different capacities, but He called them all alike to work in His Kingdom and His Church. The important lesson in Old and New Testament calls alike is this, that God can use and does use the most varied instruments for the fulfilment of His will. So is it still: the God Who called the courtier Isaiah and the herdsman Amos has called in these latter days the cobbler Carey and the cultured chaplain Henry Martyn. When God calls we must heed; there must be no excuses, no reluctance: He Who calls, enables, and He makes no mistake.

So we turn back to the special subject of our study, the prophet Jonah.

We know nothing of his training and upbringing, nothing of his preparation for the

work; simply this, that God wanted him, and God called him. He did some work in the homeland first — pleasant, happy work. He was sent to tell Israel of the restoration to it of some land that they had lost (2 Kings xiv. 25), and to encourage them in the efforts that they must make to recover it. His task was an easy one, and his lot was cast in pleasant places. Suddenly there comes to him an amazing command, extraordinary in its character, fraught with terrible danger in its fulfilment. He is to leave the homeland, and to go to Nineveh—to go to her with a message of doom. How the call came we know not, but it was unmistakably the voice of God. We are not told what Jonah thought, we are only told what he did; but we can well imagine his feelings. 'The task is a useless and unprofitable one; Nineveh deserves to suffer; why should I announce her doom to her? Other prophets have foretold that doom, safe in their own land; why should I trouble about her? Moreover, the task is dangerous. What can one prophet, and he

a despised Israelite, do amongst so many? I am only risking my life, leaving work that is useful and that I can do well, to undertake a task doomed to failure.' The claims of the homeland, the perils of the field, the incompetence of the worker for missionary activity, and the comparative fruitlessness of missionary enterprise, are modern ways of putting the thoughts that may easily have run through Jonah's mind. If they had been the thoughts of all men, there would be no missionary enterprise at all; every Jonah called of God would have stayed at home, and our modern Ninevehs would never have repented.

But 'the word of the Lord came unto Jonah, saying, . . . Arise, go,' just as the word of the Lord comes to us to-day, saying, 'Go ye into all the world.' He refused to listen, he made excuses, he disobeyed, and his disobedience did him more harm than it did Nineveh. The pathway of disobedience, the pathway of him who refuses to do 'the word of the Lord,' is ever a painful one. In Jonah's case, in the mercy of God, he came

to repentance. It is not so always. When it is not so, the called one loses the blessing and endures the misery of disobedience; God does His work through other hands; the work may be delayed, but in the end it will be accomplished. When he had learnt his lesson, Jonah went to Nineveh. The expected failure became a glorious success. He did his work grudgingly, and of necessity; and when it was done, and the mercy and justice of God were abundantly justified, Jonah was still unhappy because through his petulant narrow-mindedness the result was unexpected, and did not minister to his dignity. Jonah was a foreign missionary against his will, and without the joy of service.

One might be disposed to raise the question as to what really was the actual result of Jonah's mission. The repentance of Nineveh was extraordinarily sudden and equally short-lived. Our knowledge of the details is small. The actual effect upon individual lives is hidden; but God willed it, and there we must be content. We

read the story of missionary beginnings in a great land; perhaps we are never able to see the results; but the human mind has little capacity to connect cause and effect. The little communities of Christians, springing we know not whence, we know not how, that missionary enterprise has from time to time come into contact with in the world, for instance, the Syrian Christian Church in India, are cases in point (see Datta, 'Desire of India,' pp. 147 *sqq.*). In that sudden repentance of Nineveh, despite the subsequent reaction, there were doubtless some souls whose repentance was a reality, and whose allegiance to Jehovah was never broken.

One word more. There are calls and calls. Vocation is not always to a foreign field. Gideon's first work was in his own home, all his work in his own land. Most of the prophets were sent to their own people, or to the people of the sister kingdom. Jonah in those days was an exception; perhaps he is not an exception now. The character or the place of the

work matters little; the fact that it is the work to which God calls us matters much. God may call any one of us to any work; it is for us to study the signs of His calling, and when the door of an opportunity is open before us, immediately and unhesitatingly to enter in.

N.B.—See also 'The Reproach of Islam,'* chapter vi.

QUESTIONS.

1. How would you answer the following objections from this book or from elsewhere in Scripture?—

(*a*) Amongst so many Heathen, the most we can do is as nothing; it makes no difference whether we do much or little.

(*b*) The Heathen do not want the Gospel.

(*c*) We must think of the home Heathen first.

2. What features in Gideon's call are likely to be found repeated in the experience of any one who is called to the mission-field to-day?

3. How would you show from Scripture that God needs all kinds of men as missionaries, and sends the call in all kinds of ways?

4. What light does the book of Jonah throw on the Old Testament attitude towards the Heathen?

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* By W. H. T. Gairdner. C.M.S., 2*s.* net.

5. What excuses commonly made for not going to the mission-field receive their answer in the course of this study?

Topics for Study and Discussion.

1. What constitutes a missionary call?

2. In view of the great needs abroad and the paucity of workers, would you maintain that God only requires this small number, or that there are many whom He is calling and who are refusing to listen?

3. Would it not have been better to have left the Ninevites alone?

PROGRAMME.

Aim. — **To see what are the elements in a missionary call and what is involved in disobedience.**

1. Hymn and prayer.

2. Let different members suggest an answer to each of the first series of questions, having had them assigned to them beforehand.

3. Let two or three members briefly, in writing or otherwise, give an account of the call of either Gideon, Isaiah, Amos or Jeremiah.

4. Talk over conversationally the story of Jonah.

5. Let a five minutes' paper be prepared on one of the special topics, preferably No. 1.

6. Close with confession and prayer.

N.B.—The programmes, as printed, are simply by way of suggestion. They are generally too long for one meeting, and a selection should be made from the various items. It will mean a grievous loss to the interest of a meeting if an attempt is made to crowd too much into it. Leaders must be guided by circumstances in making their selection.

CHAPTER II.

JOEL, THE SOCIAL REFORMER.

The Secular and the Sacred in Missions.

'*Seek ye first the Kingdom of God.*'

Passage for special study.—Joel ii. 18–30.

JOEL was a missionary to his own people. He seems to have been a native of Jerusalem or the immediate neighbourhood, and to have spoken especially to the people of his own land of Judah. Of him personally we know absolutely nothing, save that he was the son of Pethuel. The name is mentioned many times in the Old Testament; but we know little of these other Joels, and nothing to identify him with any of them. It is equally uncertain when he lived. He does not mention Assyria or Babylon, and as Assyria began to be of importance about 760 B.C., and Babylon about 537, it seems likely that he must have lived before or after the period

of their importance, perhaps indeed he is one of the earliest prophets. He tells us nothing of himself, simply the fact that the call came to him and he obeyed it (Joel i. 1).

The book divides itself into two parts: in the first of them Joel speaks to the people at the Lord's bidding; in the second, Jehovah Himself speaks. The first part is taken up with a description of a terrible calamity which has come upon the people. The land has been visited with recurring plagues of locusts and with a severe drought. Some have thought that the locusts (i. 4) are simply typical of invading armies, but there is nothing to decide. Joel pictures the terrible misery that has ensued, and utters a trumpet call to repentance. For, as always, it is sin which lies behind. It is easy to glibly excuse ourselves from an interest in missionary work on the ground that the Heathen are happy enough as they are. The real student of the heathen world knows how to estimate this happiness. Turn where you will in Heathendom, and, although the circumstances may change, it is always

true, the land mourneth (i. 10; cf. ii. 21). We must teach the heathen world the meaning of sin, and then we shall be able to bring them to the happiness of knowing the Saviour. Joel depicts the misery of a sinful nation that he may bring them to repentance.

In the second half of the book, God speaks. The message of sorrow and the call to repentance had come from human lips, but from chap. ii. 18 onwards the message of mercy and of hope comes from God Himself. It is as if it was the prophet's task to bring the people into touch with God, and then for the joy of that communion to do the rest. So, too, in our missionary enterprise. Once let heathen lands catch the vision of the Saviour, and then missionary miracles begin to be. In all our methods and enterprises, with all our agencies and organizations, with Missions that are medical, educational or industrial, there must be no forgetting the one and only purpose, the bringing of the people within sound of the voice of God, the making

the men sit down (St. John vi. 10) that they may receive the Bread of Life from the Master's hands. So was it in the old days. Joel called the people to repentance, Jehovah welcomed the penitent; and in the words of His welcome He pictures a future in which the Heathen shall have their share (ii. 32; iii. 12), and which shall end in the golden days of the Kingdom of God, when all that is unholy shall be crushed out (iii. 19), and the true Jerusalem shall abide from generation to generation, for the Lord dwelleth in Zion (iii. 20, 21).

This, roughly, is the story of the book—a book the missionary meaning of which St. Peter, in the first fulness of the Spirit's inspiration, was quick to catch; for when the infant Church began her missionary warfare with the same marvellous effects that have always obtained, it was to the book of Joel that St. Peter looked for the explanation of what must have been the greatest day in his life (compare Acts ii. 16–21 with Joel ii. 28–32). And if St. Peter was right —and who of us can doubt it?—we naturally

look to the verses which follow the prophecy he quoted, verses, you will remember, spoken by Jehovah Himself, for light upon the history which St. Peter's use of these words began to create. The first Christian missionary sermon ever preached had these words as its text. Then began to be brought into actual being the future that Jehovah depicted; the fulfilment of those few verses on the Day of Pentecost begins a process which shall end with the consummation of the Kingdom of God and the coming of the New Jerusalem, that Jerusalem that shall be holy, into which all who enter shall be guests of God, when there shall be no Heathen, and no strangers shall pass through her any more (Joel iii. 17).

There are many matters of interesting study in this latter section of the book, but there is one to which we would direct especial attention, namely, the extraordinary way in which material and spiritual blessings are dealt with in close connexion, almost as if there were no difference between them, the secular and the sacred combining in one

glorious future. Joel seemed incapable of seeing our modern distinction. The whole book is full of the combination. For instance, ii. 15–19, 26; iii. 17, 18; and elsewhere. But perhaps the most striking case of all is that which a careful reading of ii. 28 discloses to us. Verse 26 tells us, 'Ye shall eat in plenty, and be satisfied'; this will help the people to know that 'God is in the midst of Israel,' and then afterward—'I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh.' It seems as if the material prosperity of the people is to be the beginning of their spiritual prosperity. At least it is absolutely clear that if Joel reflects the mind of the whole of Scripture, the Christian Church can never afford to divorce the spiritual from the material, the sacred from the secular, in her missionary enterprise.

We turn aside for a moment to try and see if Joel does thus reflect the mind of Scripture. There can be no question as to the answer. In the days of the Exodus God led the people out of Heathendom that they might worship Him in their own land;

He fed them with manna by the way. The great law-giver of the Old Testament taught with no uncertain sound the holiness of God, and yet he turned aside to formulate social and sanitary laws on which the social and sanitary laws of the world have ever since been based. Joel is not the only one amongst the prophets who emphasizes the same fact (see as examples Isaiah xxxv., Hosea xiv. 4–7, Malachi iii. 10). In the New Testament the connexion is just the same. In St. John vi. our Lord first feeds with the bread of earth before He offers the Heavenly Food. And when He wishes the true character of His work to be made plain to John the Baptist this is the message: 'Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the Gospel is preached' (St. Luke vii. 22). Only one other passage need be quoted, and that to put the two in right relationship: 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these

things shall be added unto you' (St. Matt. vi. 33). The miracle of the loaves and fishes, with the discourse that follows it (St. John vi.), provides another illustration.

We turn to the modern mission-field, and we find that the lessons we have learnt from Scripture are beginning to be taken advantage of in our missionary efforts. There are still some few, perhaps, who would confine the Church's work at home and abroad to what is held to be its purely spiritual work, who would keep the Church aloof from the manifold social problems of our own and every land; but we most of us rejoice to feel that modern Missions are playing their part, often the chiefest part, in social succour and intellectual development. India, plague-stricken and famine-ridden, has found her best helpers amongst those who have come to preach to her the Gospel of Christ. Uganda, a nation learning to walk, has, in the Uganda Company, a commercial enterprise undertaken by the friends of Missions, a wonderful exemplification of the prophet's ideal; whilst in every

mission-field the teacher and the doctor are plying their craft for the good of men's minds and bodies, that Joel's ideal may be fulfilled and the Kingdom of God may come. The way has been found through educational and medical missions into many a home and into many a heart, which otherwise would have gone untouched. Of course there are dangers, and dangers have to be faced, but they must be faced in the spirit of seeking the Kingdom of God first, and then all other things will fall into their right proportion.

In our efforts to preach the Gospel we must not forget the Master's cup of cold water, and all that it signifies. But as we would in every way win the blessing of the 'inasmuch as ye did it unto the least of these,' we must all the more remember that it is what we do in His Name and for His sake that counts. Missionary enterprise must make the heathen world feel that all our social efforts are carried through, first because we love our Master, and then because we love the souls for whom He died, that we may win them for Himself.

N.B.—Readers are strongly urged to study Chapter VI., on *Problems and Methods*, in the 'Desire of India.' * Also Chapter VII. in 'The Reproach of Islam.'

Questions.

1. Ought we to estimate the value of industrial missions simply by their spiritual results?
2. Show from the prophets how God uses judgments of a physical nature to awaken people to repentance.
3. Defend from Scripture medical missions, educational missions, industrial missions.
4. Write a short summary of Joel's message to his people.

Topics for Study and Discussion.

1. 'Man has body, soul and spirit.' Discuss this from a missionary point of view.
2. If you were a missionary, would you give the greater part of your time, supposing you had the choice, to work in hospitals or schools, or to preaching from village to village?
3. What suggestions do you gather from the book of the Prophet Joel as to the preaching of repentance, the gift of the Holy Spirit, the coming of the Kingdom of God?

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* By S. K. Datta. C.M.S., 2*s.* net.

PROGRAMME.

AIM.—**To learn the connexion between spiritual and material in missionary methods.**

1. Prayer.

2. Two members might read their answers to question 4.

3. The special passage, Joel ii. 18–20, should be read.

4. Let three members answer briefly the first three preliminary questions, with a brief discussion.

5. Let one member read a short paper on the sixth chapter in the 'Desire of India,' already referred to.

6. Let one or more of the questions for discussion be considered as time shall permit.

7. Extempore prayer by members.

N.B.—See note on page 61.

CHAPTER III.

AMOS AND HIS GOSPEL.

Christianity the One Religion.

'*The Lord, He is the God; the Lord, He is the God.*'

Passage for study.—Amos iv. 1–5; v. 1–8.

THERE was nothing in the circumstances of Amos to suggest that he was fit for prophetic work. He was not a prophet by birth or education (viii. 14, R.V., marg.). He was a mere herdsman and fruit gatherer (i. 1; vii. 14, 15). He lived at Tekoa, twelve miles south of Jerusalem. He was probably poor, but able, at God's command, to leave his flock for a while. He wrote in the days of Jeroboam II., king of Israel (2 Kings xvi. 23), at a time when the kingdom of Israel was remarkably prosperous. Prosperity meant forgetfulness of God, or rather absence of spiritual religion. Luxury was rife (iii. 15; vi. 4–6); business immorality showed

itself in various ways (ii. 6–8; viii. 4–6); and yet, despite the national dishonour of God, the sanctuaries of Bethel, Gilgal and Beersheba were crowded with worshippers (iv. 4, 5). To such a people was Amos sent. At God's bidding he goes from his own land of Judah, first to Bethel, and then probably to Samaria. He denounces the sins of Israel, and foretells the doom of king and country. Amaziah, chief priest of Bethel, charges him with treason (vii. 10–15), and sends word to Jeroboam II. But Amos defends his action, speaks his message, and withdraws.

The great contribution that Amos makes to Christian and missionary study is his conception of Jehovah and His requirements. The most elaborate worship is but an insult to Him when offered by those who have no mind to conform their wills and conduct to His requirements. He delights in spiritual worship, and all else is distasteful to Him (iii. 14; iv. 4; v. 4, 5; vii. 9; viii. 14). The righteousness, the greatness, and the nearness of God are special features of his revelation of Jehovah.

God has untold forces at His command; He is supreme in nature and in history.

The religion of Israel, having for so long centred round the sanctuaries of Bethel and Dan, at this time had not only continued the unspiritual worship set up by Jeroboam I., but had tended to absorb much of the idolatry that prevailed amongst adjoining nations. Old Israel was beginning to say just what the modern scoffer at Missions has so frequently said: 'One religion is as good as another.' It was to meet this, amongst other things, that the message of Amos was delivered. The life of the nation had deteriorated, because it had forsaken the old, simple worship of Jehovah, and had turned to mere formalism, if not to idolatry. Neither Bethel nor Gilgal nor Beersheba can save them; 'Seek the Lord, and ye shall live' (v. 6). The men of Israel refused to listen to Amos, and they paid the penalty of their refusal.

When we begin to make comparative study of the religions of to-day, when we place the religion of the Lord Jesus Christ

alongside the religions of Buddha, Confucius or Mohammed, we need to observe the caution with which Amos deals with the subject in his day. It is one thing to say, 'One religion is as good as another,' but quite a different thing to say, 'There is good in every religion.' In dealing with the superstitious externalism of Bethel and Gilgal, Amos does not say that there is no element of good in that which he condemns. What he does say is that when you bring religion to the test of whether it gives power for life and character, it is the religion of Jehovah, the religion of Christ alone, that stands the test. 'Seek ye *Me*, and ye shall *live*.' And so in the New Testament it is: 'None other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved' (Acts iv. 12).

Some may remember the old allegory of the man who had fallen into a pit, and who was crying for help to get himself out. Mohammed passes by and tries to comfort him with the thought that it was fated for him so to fall, that he

must be content and give praise to Allah. Buddha comes, tells him that it is his own fault, that the world is very sad, that he can take comfort in the fact that he is only sharing the common sadness, that he must try to imagine he is not there. Confucius bids him get out himself, and gives him a long list of methods, by the careful observance of which he can extricate himself. The list of passers-by might be multiplied. The religions of the heathen world to-day might be applied in the same way to the same problem, but the man would still be in the pit.

Behind all religious effort lies the great fact of sin, and human powerlessness to meet it. Man has fallen into a pit, and it is the religion of Jesus Christ alone that stretches out a hand to lift him out: 'Seek ye Me, and ye shall live.'

The story of the man in the pit illustrates one aspect of the function of religion, one test to which the religions of Heathenism must be subjected, but this is not all. It is a fair thing to ask the exponents of any

religion what power they possess to deliver man from the bondage of sin; but when he is delivered, another question must be asked: What can they do to keep him free, to develop his character, and make him worthy of liberty? And when we have collected the answers and compared them, the position is just the same. The superstitious worship of Israel meant a nation of loose moral character, and although sometimes the *good* in a particular religion, God-given good after all (Jas. i. 17), does help the development of some particular aspect of character, that *good* is accompanied by so much of evil, that the character developed is still hopelessly mis-shapen and deformed.

Those interested in the study of other religions will find a useful summary in a little book by Principal Grant, 'Religions of the World,'* and a very interesting study of the moral and social effects of Mohammedanism in the Rev. W. H. T. Gairdner's new book, 'The Reproach of Islam' (ch. v.).

One difficulty must be faced—a difficulty

* R. and R. Clark. *6d.*

which the reading of Amos will have suggested. Is Christianity, after all, any more successful than the rest? Cannot the strictures of Amos upon superstitious Israel be as accurately referred to Christian England? It is perfectly true—we confess it to our shame—that we have unreality, dishonesty, unfairness and oppression rife amongst us, even amongst us who yield allegiance to Christ; perfectly true that noble acts are done by those who are outside the light of Christ, which challenge comparison with the acts of Christians. But we must draw no hasty conclusions, or they will be unfair. The question is, Which religion, under the same conditions, produces the best results? and no one would care to dispute the answer. Even if the religion of Christ be seriously handicapped in its exercise, any fair examination of the facts reveals its excellence and improving power. The only religion which can save and keep man is the religion of Christ, the only religion which brings man from despair and ennobles him. Few know much of the ghastly iniquities of

Heathenism; 'it is a shame even to speak of them.' Christian England may be a misnomer, for England is not altogether Christian; and heathen England, England greedy of gain (v. 11, vi. 4–6), by her behaviour at home, and by her behaviour and mercantile avarice abroad, has often sinned against the Heathen in their darkness. But if we compare for a moment the average condition of personal character and of public opinion at home with that in heathen lands, once again English Christianity at its weakest stands superior to Heathenism at its best. It is not meant that the weakest professor of Christianity is a better man than the best Heathen, but that, speaking broadly, the truth is as stated. God has not left Himself without witness in Heathendom (Rom. i. 14, 15; Acts xiv. 17), but all the witness that has been given points to Christ as the one final Revelation of the Will of God. We who possess the full Revelation would be guilty indeed if out of our fulness we were content to leave the Heathen to starve on the few crumbs that they possess.

No; if Christianity is the one religion—and every book in the New Testament shows that it is, and not a few in the Old—it is the clear and bounden duty of Christian people to spread their faith to the ultimate displacement of all others. Christ and the gods of Rome cannot stand in the same Pantheon. Dagon falls in the presence of the Ark of Jehovah. It must be so, and it is for the Christian Church to make it so. Amos's vision of Jehovah in His righteousness, His omnipotence and His nearness to us all, enthrones Him alone. And so must we.

> Jesus shall reign where'er the sun
> Doth his successive journeys run;
> His kingdom stretch from shore to shore,
> Till moons shall wax and wane no more.

'The kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ' (Rev. xi. 15, note R.V.). See also 'The Reproach of Islam,' chs. iv., v.

QUESTIONS.

1. What was the attitude of Amos to other religions?
2. How would you deal with the statements—
   (*a*) One religion is as good as another.

(*b*) England gives both missionaries and opium to China; so much for Christianity.

(*c*) Surely the religion of a caste best fits its needs?

3. What was really wrong with the religion of Bethel, and why?

Topics for Study and Discussion.

1. God reveals Himself in many ways, even in the Bible. Why should not Islam be a real revelation?

2. Buddhism has produced men of tremendous devotion and self-sacrifice; where does it fall short of Christianity?

3. God has not left Himself without witness in heathen lands. How has that witness made its presence felt?

4. How do you account for a good Heathen?

PROGRAMME.

Aim. — **To see what the statement means: Christianity is a universal religion.**

1. Series of short extempore prayers.

2. Brief account of Amos and his work by a member.

3. Read special passages, iv. 1–5; v. 1–8.

4. Let the questions be answered in turn by members, the answers being read or prepared beforehand, but in either case being quite short. The different parts of Question 2 might be dealt with by different members.

5. A five minutes' paper on one of the three great religions of Heathenism might be read.

6. The questions for discussion should be talked over.

7. Prayer.

N.B.—See note on p. 61.

CHAPTER IV.

HAGGAI AND CHURCH BUILDING.

Missions in the Working.

'*Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel.*'

Passage for special study.—Haggai i. 4–6, 13; ii. 4–9, 20–23.

THIS little book of Haggai* contains the gist of some three or four addresses, quite probably open-air addresses, delivered by him in the year 520 B.C. in Jerusalem. Rarely are we able to date the minor prophets so exactly, or to describe the circumstances of their work so fully. In Haggai's case, the books of Ezra and Nehemiah and contemporary profane history all bear direct testimony to the circumstances under which he wrote. Those circumstances are worth recalling. In the year 538, the seventy weary years of exile ended. Cyrus permitted some of the Jews to return under Zerubbabel and Joshua, and the

* Haggai is a word of two syllables, not of three.

rebuilding of the city wall and of the temple began (Ezra i. and iii.). The Jews had immediately to face the opposition of the neighbouring peoples. They were hindered in their work (Ezra iv. 4) and plotted against at court (iv. 5). Presently, when Smerdis (or Artaxerxes, as he is called in Ezra), had usurped the Persian throne, the returned exiles were compelled to cease their labours. Hindered from doing God's work, they lapsed into comparative luxury, and as they began to enjoy national prosperity, they ceased to feel the shame of leaving God's work undone (Haggai i. 4). Then Haggai and Zechariah are sent to reprove them, to encourage them, and to set them again to work. Haggai's mission was gloriously and speedily successful. Notice the dates. On the first day of the sixth month of the second year of the reign of Darius he first addressed the people (Haggai i. 1); on the twenty-fourth day of the same month the work was in full swing. Apparently they worked with sad hearts, thinking of the poverty of their best, and comparing the

house they were building with the house as once it was. On the twenty-first day of the seventh month (ii. 1) the prophet comes with a message of encouragement and promise, and so twice again in the ninth month. God was indeed with them. They are reported to the king because of their efforts; the report leads to the unearthing of Cyrus's old decree of help (Ezra vi. 1–12). As a result their very enemies are compelled to help them (vi. 13), and before the sixth year of Darius's reign is past (vi. 15) the work is done and the temple rebuilt. Remarkably successful prophet, remarkably successful church-building; but what lessons can it all teach the student of modern Missions?

First of all, look at the indifference and selfishness that abounded (i. 4), 'your ceiled houses,' this 'house lying waste.' How easily we can make similar comparisons: your drink bill of nearly 160 millions, and the largest missionary society's income falling hundreds of thousands of pounds short of a single million; your sweets, your flowers or your tobacco always provided, but your

missionary subscription in these hard times cut down. More is spent in theatres in the one city of London, so it is estimated, than in Missions the kingdom through; golf balls cost the country—aye, and a good many Christian individuals—more than Missions. How many poor people, who grudge the shilling that a missionary book costs, spend many shillings in wasteful—sometimes harmful—luxury! It were good for us all to look into our accounts and see whether we are 'seeking first the Kingdom of God.' Ceiled houses were not condemned; it was the lack of proportion, the lack of right relationship, that brought the prophet's censure. The Jew of old was taught to give a tenth of his possessions to God. If it were done to-day in England, even only by those who profess to serve Him, the day of deficits and retrenchment would be gone for ever. (The roughly estimated annual income of our land is £1,200,000,000.) Ceiled houses take different forms, but we have no right to live in them while the House of God, the world that rightly belongs to Him, lies waste.

The Jews, apparently, were content to let it lie waste (Haggai i. 2). The time is not come that the Lord's house should be built. 'It was a grave crisis in the history of the community. They were rapidly reconciling themselves to an existence without a temple: yet existence without a temple meant (humanly speaking) the extinction of the national religion.' So Dean Kirkpatrick sums up the situation; and how solemnly his words may be applied to the present so-called 'pause' in missionary enterprise! The living Church is the missionary Church, and the Church that is content to let her missionary energy slacken is yielding to a disease which will end in death. Haggai himself presses the point (ii. 13 to end); using an illustration from their own ceremonial law, he shows how both they and the land had been defiled by their neglect, and how they can alone win God's blessing if they return to duty. Here, in the homeland, we are bound sorrowfully to confess that Christianity is not in possession; we grieve over our divisions and our crises; may it

not be that we need to learn the lesson of Haggai (i. 5, 6, 10, 11), that the prosperity of our Church at home depends on our doing our whole duty to God, and that we cannot expect prosperity at home until in each heathen land the Church is built?

Surely, too, part of the success of this specially successful Church building lay in the fact that all had a share in it, as all were expected to have. In i. 14 we are told that not only were Zerubbabel and Joshua aroused, but 'the spirit of all the remnant of the people,' and, once roused, they worked. So, too, in ii. 4, 'Be strong, all ye people of the land . . . and work.' What is anybody's concern is nobody's concern; what is everybody's concern gets done. In the Church's missionary enterprise all have a share. The great commission was spoken to the whole Church; and we may be sure of this, that in the missionary work of the Church the humblest believer has a place in work, in prayer and in sacrifice.

Some of us are poor hands at Church building, unskilled labourers, barely worth

employing at all. Is it so? Even so, all are not to be masons or joiners; there is room for the unskilled labourer. 'Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house' (i. 8). It is not the character of the work but its spirit that counts. 'Man,' says Carlyle, 'it is not thy works, which are all mortal, and the greatest of them not greater than the least, but the spirit in which thou workest that has worth or continuance.' The secret of success did not lie in the skill of the workers, nor does it now: it lay and it lies in the reiterated message, 'I am with you, saith the Lord' (Haggai i. 13). We hear sometimes of the decay of spiritual religion. It is well to ask ourselves whether this decay at home and the frequent pauses abroad are due to our neglect to claim the promised presence. No slight increase of income or in number of workers removes the need of Haggai's message. The crux of how to keep a three-man station going with two men is not the question. It is why there should be only one such station when there ought to be a hundred. A fair

consideration of the real problem shows that we have barely touched the fringe of it, that our biggest enterprises are but little more than 'playing at Missions.' We have fallen short in our prayers and we have fallen short in our efforts, and the presence of the Master is only promised to the Church that prays and the Church that works. Are we willing to work? Are we willing to pray? Are we working and praying as we might?

It is noteworthy, again, how the resources of the land (Haggai i. 8) and the people of the land (Ezra vi. 13) around them were compelled to make their contribution to the work. To what extent is this comparable with modern missionary methods? Ultimately the building of the Church in heathen lands must be done by the natives of the land. We may help, encourage, foster and make beginnings. The cathedral at Mengo was reared by willing native labour. The Baganda built their cathedral and are building their Church. The future of Missions is with the Native Churches. But as we

encourage and develop native agency, it is not for us to save our own pockets and throw the burden on some poverty-stricken, struggling community but late emerged from Heathenism. The future of Missions is indeed with the Native Churches, but our responsibility is in no wise thereby lessened. And what a problem the statement suggests. Can we trust these one-time foes of Christ to help His work? How did it come about in the days of Haggai? It came about quite naturally in virtue of the presence of the Lord. Perhaps we may not hurry in the formation of Native Churches under native rulers; but it is in directions of this kind we must expect progress. The Haggai parallel suggests it. St. Paul could trust the Church in Corinth, a veritable sink of iniquity, to rule itself; he could ordain elders in every place; and it may be sometimes we are too timid. Still we ponder and pray, and progress comes. We have African bishops, and presently, if God will, we shall have Indian, and Japanese, and Chinese. Why not? God speed the day

and give us wisdom. And there are other contributions which heathen lands can make. Bishop Westcott is reported to have said that the best commentary on St. John's Gospel will never be written until India is converted to Christ. He meant that the mystic Eastern mind alone is able to appreciate and explain the words of one so like themselves in many things as the beloved Apostle. Mr. A. G. Fraser, of Trinity College, Kandy, during one of his visits to England, emphasized the fact more than once that if we are to win India we must preach an Indian Christ to them, not an English or a foreign Christ. What he meant was that we must show Christ, Who is the same yesterday and for ever and never changes, to the natives of India in a way in which they will be able to understand Him; and we can only do this if we use for Him all that India can contribute; we must press her men into our service, and we must take timber from her forests.

Ere we leave this tiny prophecy, notice how the prophet speaks of himself and his

work (Haggai i. 13)—the Lord's messenger in the Lord's message. He had a difficult task ahead; maybe he doubted his qualification for it. The message he had to deliver might not be acceptable: it was the censure of sloth and neglect and the command to labour and toil. Who is sufficient for these things? And the answer is, The Lord's messenger in the Lord's message. Let the Church once realize that she is the messenger of Christ bearing His message, and all the paltry excuses will be swept aside, all the half-hearted effort and the selfish cessation of effort will go; strong in the greatness of the office, and enthusiastic in the glory of her message, the Church of Christ must rise to a new proclamation of the Gospel, straining every nerve to the uttermost, calling every resource to her aid until 'Thy Kingdom come.' 'Even so, come, Lord Jesus.'

N.B.—See Gairdner 'Reproach of Islam,' chap. i.

Questions.

1. Under what circumstances did Haggai deliver his message?

2. What are the chief missionary lessons that the study of the prophecy suggests?

3. Account for Haggai's success.

4. In what respects does the Church of to-day specially resemble the people to whom Haggai spoke?

Questions for Study and Discussion.

1. What advantage has a Native Church in comparison with a foreign missionary body as an evangelistic force (Datta's 'Desire of India,' ch. vii.)?

2. What is the proper standard of Christian giving? Illustrate from Haggai (and Malachi).

3. Compare a missionary mission with the mission of Haggai in its methods and results.

PROGRAMME.

Aim.—**To deepen our sense of shame at the Church's selfishness and indifference to the spread of God's Kingdom.**

1. Missionary Litany.

2. Read selected passages.

3. Let a member answer Question 1.

4. Let two members read separate answers to Question 2.

5. Let a member prepare and give an account of a Native Church: Tinnevelly ('Desire of India,' p. 176 *sqq.*) or Lagos, or as wished.

6. Let Questions 3 and 4 be answered.

7. Discuss first study question.

8. Let one member answer the second.

9. Discuss the third Question.

10. Extempore prayer.

N.B.—See note, p. 61.

CHAPTER V.

ZECHARIAH, THE PROPHET OF HOPE.

The Prospect of Missions.

'Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord.'

Passage for study.—Zech. ii. 10–13; iii. 1–8; iv. 1–10.

AT a missionary meeting some years ago, a civil servant of high rank had been taking the chair, and had concluded his speech with the remark, 'At this moment the prospect of Missions is exceedingly dark.' 'No,' said the veteran missionary who followed him, 'it is the present *aspect* of Missions that is dark; the *prospect* of Missions is as bright as the promises of God can make it.' The veteran missionary then, by his apt reminder, exactly fulfilled the function that had fallen to the lot of Zechariah centuries before. The historical situation is precisely the same as that in the book of Haggai. Zechariah seems to have

been a younger prophet, and at any rate he began his work just two months after Haggai uttered his last recorded address (Zech. i. 7). His message, in the main, is the message of Haggai. He enforces the same truths, encourages the people to the same work, inspires them with the same, indeed, with even loftier, hopes. The first portion of the book—and with that alone we propose to deal—contains a series of visions which Zechariah saw, and which he is bidden to pass on. It is impossible in a single study to do more than give a rough outline of those visions and their meaning.

The first (chap. i. 1–17), the vision of the horses, tells us of messengers of Jehovah, who go all through the earth, and find peace everywhere, except in the derelict city of Jerusalem and among the returned exiles. An angel intercedes for Jerusalem, and Jehovah answers that he will again comfort Zion, and again choose Jerusalem (verse 17). A special missionary interest of the vision centres in the divine outlook over heathen lands. God does care for the Heathen, and

although here the welfare of the Church at home is the matter immediately in mind, the divine interest in the Heathen (verse 15) is an earnest that when the home Church is rebuilt, there will come the time to consider the needs of those beyond.

In the second vision (chap. i. 18–21) the prophet sees four horns, symbolic of the powers of evil, that hinder the progress of his people. Beside them stand four smiths, ready to shatter them, an assurance that the powers of evil shall be ultimately brought into subjection.

In the third vision (chap. ii.), a man with a measuring rod sets out to measure Jerusalem, to teach the lesson of God's care for His people. And here again, lest that divine protection shall minister to a self-satisfied and exclusive Church, we have the presence of the Lord promised in verse 10, and in verse 11 a most definite promise of the bringing in of the nations. In the great commission we remember that the presence of the Master is connected with the command to work; here the presence of the Lord is

coupled with the gathering in of the nations which is to be the result of that work.

In the fourth vision (chap. iii. 1–10) we see Joshua the High Priest, clothed in filthy garments, standing before the bar of God with Satan bearing testimony against him. He stands as representing the people. But the Adversary who demands his condemnation is rebuked, and presently Joshua is arrayed in the fair garments of the priesthood. The vision often receives its fulfilment to-day. There are some tribes and some nations so utterly degraded that missionary enterprise seems wasted upon them; 'Ephraim is joined to her idols, let her alone.' But when the Angel of the Lord, the missionary messenger, intervenes, Joshua clad in filthy garments becomes a priest and a king. Not yet has the race been found which the Gospel of Christ cannot touch. The story of Charles Darwin and the Patagonians will be familiar in this connexion. He thought them scarcely human, certainly beyond the power of any civilizing force, and when missionary labour

amongst them had not only civilized them but made them Christian, Darwin, sceptic though he was, subscribed to the missionary society.

The next vision (chap. iv.) is the vision of the golden candlestick, the lamps of which were perpetually fed from the olive-trees that stood beside. When men are cleansed and fitted for service, as we saw Joshua cleansed and fitted in chapter iii., that service is made possible by the sustaining power of the Holy Spirit, and this is the lesson that is taught, in the striking imagery of this vision, by the presence of the two olive-trees from which the lamp-stand receives its continuous supply. It is here that the greatest hope of missionary enterprise lies. Notice particularly the divine message to Zerubbabel, as he represents the people to whom the building of the temple was entrusted, 'Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts. Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain. . . . The hands of

Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it; and thou shalt know that the Lord of Hosts hath sent me unto you' (iv. 6–9). And surely it is not overpressing the passage to give it a missionary application, and to make it inspire a missionary hope, when in verse 10 the question is asked, 'Who hath despised the day of small things?' and a moment later we are told that these 'small things' are as 'the eyes of the Lord, which run to and fro through the whole earth' (iv. 10).* The prophet was engaged in encouraging the builders of a humble temple; but as he speaks his Master's message, he is compelled to take the wider view that covers the whole earth.

The next two visions (chapter v.) teach the all-important lesson that Israel's restoration is to mean a spiritual reformation. The 'flying roll' (verse 2) is the emblem of the condemnation of sinners, and 'the woman

* For this curious phrase, see also 2 Chron. xvi. 9; Prov. xv. 3. God sees the need of His people and His world, and hastens to meet them.

who is carried away in the measure' is the picture of the taking away from the land of God—and the whole earth is His—of all that is wicked and unholy.

In chapter vi. verses 1–8, the vision of the four chariots going forth to execute vengeance upon the Heathen in all directions is typical again, not only of God's care for His people, but of God's interest in those far heathen lands. God cares for the Heathen, but He does not excuse them from judgment, a fact we do well to remember (see Romans, chap. i.). Then Zechariah turns from the telling of his visions to the performance of a great symbolic act: Joshua, the High Priest, is crowned with a kingly crown, and is given the symbolic name of 'the Branch,' and it is told of him that he shall build the temple. Surely this symbolic act is best fulfilled in another Joshua,* even Jesus, Who is our King and Priest, in Whose name we help to build, and one day shall

* The names 'Joshua' and 'Jesus' are really identical; they both mean 'Saviour.' Notice that Joshua the son of Nun is called Jesus in Acts vii. 45, and in Heb. iv. 8 (A.V.).

complete, that spiritual Temple to which every nation shall make its contribution.

Zechariah did not speak in vain; the work progressed, and finally the temple was completed. In four years and a half the work was done, and in those latter times Zechariah spoke more than once of the glories of the future, glories in which other nations should share, culminating with the splendid picture of all the nations of the world hastening to Zion with the cry upon their lips, 'We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you' (viii. 23).

There is much more in this little book worthy of our study, but we must go no farther. It only remains to gather up its teaching concerning the Christian's hope, the hope which is not satisfied with the personal salvation of the individual, but which would win the world for God. More than one of his visions emphasize the divine interest in the whole world: the horsemen traverse the whole earth (i. 11); the chariots pass in all directions (vi. 8); all the nations are gathered in (viii. 22). This divine interest uses human

instrumentality; the smiths (i. 20); the man with the measuring line (ii. 1); the women with the wind in their wings (v. 9); and Joshua, in each vision that concerns him; all these make this plain. But the human instrument must be cleansed and consecrated, must recognize that it is but an instrument. If all depended upon Joshua and Zerubbabel, the hope of achievement would be small indeed. Joshua, in his filthy garments, was a piteous object; Zerubbabel had little might or power; the lamp-stands of themselves could give no light; but before Zerubbabel the great mountain became a plain, not by his might or power but by the Spirit of the Lord of Hosts (iv. 6–8). Joshua, clothed in fair raiment, with the Angel of the Lord standing by, could be used to remove the iniquity of that land in one day (iii. 9), and the two olive-trees planted by the side of the lamp-stand teach in simplest form St. Paul's lesson: 'My God shall supply all your need.'

There is little need to linger over the vision of the future, the lesson of hope

is clear and certain. The lesson is *hope*, because God is with us; *hope*, because the Heathen are not blind forces, but are under the power and the judgment and the saving influence of God. Look round—despair; look up—hope. Let hope be genuine; despair dishonours God. 'The evangelization of the world is possible.' How many say this in a tone that belies their words! How many say, 'With man it is impossible, with God it is possible,' in a way that means *their* expectations are clearly limited to the first clause! When God is accounted a *reality*, a *present-day reality*, then the hope also becomes real. Otherwise it is a pious delusion. Then we shall work and pray with enthusiasm; when, with Carey, we 'expect great things from God,' we shall 'attempt great things for God.' Yes, the lesson of the moment is the lesson of prayer and work, of cleansed and devoted service, and then, as the temple was built of old, the Temple of the Nations shall be built to-day. Joshua *

* We have seen Joshua first as typical of the people—sinful and cleansed (p. 100); then as a type of Christ, the

and Zerubbabel represent to us the Church at home, ready to stretch out its hands to the task of building the Church abroad. They must be clean hands, they must be consecrated hands, and whatever the aspect of missionary enterprise suggests to-day, there is prospect of a to-morrow when 'they that are far off shall come and build in the Temple of the Lord . . . and this shall come to pass, if ye will diligently obey the voice of the Lord your God' (vi. 15).

QUESTIONS.

1. What do we know of the prophet Zechariah and his work? When did he prophesy?

2. What seems to have been the special object with which he spoke? How did he try to attain it?

3. Narrate, and show the meaning of, the visions of the man with the measuring-rod, Joshua in filthy garments, the golden candlestick.

4. What indications are there in these chapters of a universal extension of the Kingdom of God?

5. What is there in the prophecy to justify the title 'The Prophet of Hope'?

Sin-bearer and Saviour (p. 103); now finally as typical of those who, saved themselves, would speed the Saviour's work for others.

Questions for Study and Discussion.

1. Discuss the present aspect of Missions in India (see Datta's 'Desire of India'), or China (see Smith's 'Uplift of China'), or Mohammedan lands (see Gairdner's 'Reproach of Islam').

2. Bring six distinct missionary promises from other parts of the Bible.

3. Supposing the aspect of Missions seemed almost hopeless, what would be our greatest encouragement to persevere (see Zech. ii. 11; St. Matt. xxviii. 18, 19)?

PROGRAMME.

Aim.—**To arouse a real enthusiasm in view of the hopefulness of God's promises.**

1. Missionary litany.

2. Let two members answer Questions 1 and 2 respectively, with brief discussion.

3. Let the record of one of the visions mentioned in Question 3 be read and explained.

4. Let a short paper, prepared beforehand by a member, or even two, by two members, five minutes each, be read on the first question for study.

5. Either Question 4 or 5 or Question 2 for study may be talked over by the members.

6. Let the leader speak briefly on the third question for discussion.

7. Extempore prayer.

N.B.—See note, p. 61.

CHAPTER VI.

MALACHI, THE MESSENGER OF THE ADVENT.

A Lesson in Service.

'My Name is great among the Gentiles.'

Passage for study.—Mal. i. 1–11 ; iii. 1–6, 16–18.

THE word Malachi simply means, 'My Messenger' (Haggai i. 13; Mal. iii. 1), and is probably not a proper name, and so the book that we know by this title is the work of some nameless messenger of Jehovah. It matters not who the worker is, so long as the work be done. Some have thought that Ezra himself was the writer, but it is best to accept this message as the 'burden of the Word of the Lord,' coming to us from God Himself through some nameless prophet, remembering that it is the Lord's message alone that gives importance to His messenger.

We are by no means certain of its date. It was written when the Jew was still under

Persian dominion, as the reference to the governor (i. 8) proves; possibly during the interval between Nehemiah's two visits to Jerusalem, possibly some little time before the life and work of Ezra. In either event, it is the last message of Old Testament prophecy, written while the day of the Lord's coming is still far off, the only break in the long silence between the encouraging messages of Zechariah and Haggai and the mission of the Baptist. The prophecy in the main deals with the sin of neglect and indifference which had settled down like some foul blight on a people still outwardly religious. There had come a parenthesis of spiritual life and activity; God, in very deed, was forgotten, though He was so actively and openly worshipped. The priests, the leaders and teachers of the nation, had ignored their responsibilities and had yielded to selfishness and indifference; and in measured terms the prophet rebukes them. Lack of spiritual life had not only meant absence of real worship, as opposed to that which is merely ritual, but had meant, as

it always must, sooner or later, open and disgraceful sin (iii. 5).

Whether as the cause or the effect of the current indifference, there had grown up a disinclination to believe that the 'Day of the Lord' would ever come; as it was in the days of Noah and of Lot, so it was in the days of the nameless messenger—men lived as if God were merely a name, and His judgment and His justice things which did not really exist or could be lightly ignored. A layman said a little while ago to the writer, 'It is a pity you clergy have given up hell.' The suggestion, of course, was an exaggeration; but one sometimes wonders whether the smaller place that the 'Day of the Lord' holds in our modern thought has not made us more careless both in our own lives and of God's work at home and abroad. We are waiting 'till He come,' and one of the things that hinder that coming is assuredly our slackness in doing the work that must be completed ere He come. One of the motives for missionary enthusiasm lies hidden in the words of the oft-repeated

prayer, 'Thy Kingdom come.' The coming of the Christ, longed for even in the days of Malachi by some few pious souls (iii. 16), might have been, in its human welcome, a very different coming if the messenger's voice had been heard and heeded. The winning of the world for God is His will, and *the* motive for missionary enterprise, higher and greater than any other can be, is the fact that He commands. As we shall see in a moment, Jehovah was even then looking beyond the confines of the people who had been for so long peculiarly His; but the sin and the indifference of the whole land prevented missionary enterprise then, and the Heathen did not first hear from Jewish lips of the coming of the King. When one remembers the centuries of privilege and opportunity granted to Israel, it is sad indeed to know that for the heathen world beyond to be represented in worship at the cradle of the Messiah, God had to find other than human means. The story of the wise men and the star is a disgraceful page in the history of Judaism; and, alas! it

is not without parallel in the Christian Church.

In some significant verses in this prophecy (i. 7, 8) a lesson is taught, needed then, needed still. Polluted bread was placed upon the altar; the blind and lame and sick of the flock were offered in sacrifice; the best was not given to God; and in righteous sarcasm the divine messenger adds, 'Present it now unto thy governor,' meaning their earthly prince; 'will he be pleased with thee?' The old sacrificial law had taught, in terms that could not be misunderstood, that only the best is fit for the service of God; the victim, whatever it was, must be without blemish. The offering of the rich must be worthy of his riches; the demand upon the poor was according to his poverty; the greatness or the smallness of the offering did not determine its acceptance; great or small, it must be spotless; it must be the best. The amount of the subscription does not determine its value, but the motive that lies behind it and the spirit in which it is given. That is the lesson of the polluted offering.

There is another lesson that equally needs to be learnt, and the messenger of old had to teach it (iii. 7–12). Sometimes the gifts were withheld altogether, and the prophet calls it robbery of God, and promises for it the punishment that it deserves. The law of Christian giving is, 'as God hath prospered' (1 Cor. xvi. 2). If the law were observed, there would be no need for anxiety concerning the financial side of the Church's work; but until Christian people begin to understand and to act upon it, we must expect to have deficits, and to submit to retrenchment. When a new tax is imposed, or a new expense caused, we find Christian people closing their purse-strings, and religious societies suffering infinitely more than the additional expense warrants. If there be a real diminution of income, which does demand personal retrenchment, there is legitimate reason for reduction of gifts, but, even so, only proportionate reduction. But, on the other hand, one is inclined to ask, How often does considerable increase in income go unaccompanied by proportionate

increase in giving? It is only for us to judge ourselves; but it may be that some of our consciences may be touched by the fact that Malachi calls absence of proportionate giving robbery of God.

The message of this unknown messenger is a saddening and a heart-searching one, but there are some striking words on the other side. There is no grander and more assured prophecy of the triumphs of missionary enterprise than chapter i. verse 11, 'For from the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same, My Name is great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense is offered unto My Name and a pure offering.'* The R.V. text has the present tense, but the words 'shall be' are inserted in the margin. There is no need for the marginal reference. So sure is prophecy of its fulfilment, that it speaks of that fulfilment as already brought about. We have

* Some think the reference is to the purer worship of the Jews living away from Palestine at the time of the prophet's writing. This may be; but the wider missionary reference is not thereby excluded. The phrases simply mean God is acceptably worshipped. Naturally the phraseology of Jewish, not Christian, worship is used.

seen much in these Old Testament books to indicate the universal Kingdom of the Messiah; here in plain terms, so sure is the fact, it is taken for granted. The spiritual life of the nation was at lowest ebb; its worship of Jehovah was merely mechanical; the spirit of giving had ceased to exist; priests and people alike were guilty; selfishness and indifference were rampant; the great world around was lying in darkness and in the shadow of death. And yet the prophet's lips do not falter; the magnificent assurance rings out, 'His name is great among the Gentiles.' It was to be, it is still to be. As then, so now, the commission is given to the faithful few, and there is no doubt of its accomplishment. There was a faithful few even then (iii. 16; iv. 2). God remembers them, God helps them, and, in the promise of chapter iv. verse 3, we see the army of Christ passing to victory. The work shall be done, of that there can be no doubt; to us is given the privilege of a share in the doing. We must see to it that we are worthy, worthy in

consecrated life and gift, worthy in motive and obedience, lest it be said of us as it was said of the priests of old (ii. 2). 'If ye will not hear, and if ye will not lay it to heart, to give glory unto My Name, saith the Lord of Hosts, I will even send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings' (chap. ii. 2). The blessings are ours, and there is no sadder responsibility than an unused blessing.

Questions.

1. What were the special sins of the people to whom Malachi wrote?
2. In what way did the service of these people come short?
3. What indications have we here of the future of Missions?
4. What indication can you find of an unreality in modern religion similar to that in the time of Malachi.

Questions for Study and Discussion.

1. What do we learn from this prophecy as to the duty and character of Christian giving?
2. What are the true characteristics of a worker for Christ? (See chapter ii. verses 5 to 7.)
3. If the Lord Jesus were to come to-morrow, of what things in relation to missionary enterprise would you expect Him to disapprove?

PROGRAMME.

AIM.—**To bring out the need of reality in service and in giving in view of the Lord's coming.**

1. Missionary collects.
2. Read the special passages.
3. Let Questions 1 and 2 be answered by individual members.
4. Let a short paper on the first Question for study be read.
5. Let the second Question for study be discussed.
6. Let the passages required to answer Question 3 or 4 be read.
7. Discuss the third Question for study, and let a member prepare a short account of the present position of Missions in the world.
8. Prayer.

N.B.—See note, p. 61.

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WILLIAM CLOWES AND SONS, LIMITED,
LONDON AND BECCLES.

William Carey Int'l University
3 1539 0064495